

Waste Reduction Tips

Maine State Planning Office

Waste Management & Recycling Program



Each Maine resident generates over a half ton of trash every year. What can we do about it? While participating in local recycling programs is a good way to divert waste from disposal, the most environmentally and economically sound solution is to create less waste in the first place. The choices that you make today affect the environment tomorrow. Simple decisions that you make everyday can conserve natural resources and reduce the need for additional disposal capacity. Listed below are some easy and effective ways for you to prevent and reduce waste.

Don't Pay More for Less - Choose Items With Minimal or No Packaging

Packaging makes up 1/3 of the average household's garbage and accounts for approximately 10% of the price you pay for food.

- Avoid buying products that have excessive, multi-layer packaging.
- Buy products in bulk or in the largest size available. This way you will minimize the amount of packaging per unit of product *and save money!*
- Buy products in packages that are recyclable in your local program (i.e. glass, metal, rigid plastic, aluminum).
- Buy concentrates - why pay more for a big package when you can just add water yourself?
- Buy recycled! By choosing products and packaging made from recycled materials, you are supporting recycling markets.

Reuse Packaging and Other Items

- Use glass jars for storing foods, such as flour, nuts, and dried fruit, or for other items such as screws, nails, buttons, etc.
- Reuse paper and plastic bags; better yet, invest in canvas shopping bags.
- Wash and reuse plastic dinnerware for parties, picnics, and potlucks.
- Use plastic margarine and yogurt containers for freezing foods or storing leftovers in the fridge.
- Wash and reuse aluminum pie plates.
- Give magazines to friends, office waiting rooms, hospitals, school home economics classes, etc.
- Save polystyrene packing peanuts and use them again; better yet, ask mail order companies to ship in paper, not polystyrene.

Buy Durable, Long-lasting Products

- Think about the purchases you make. Durable, long-lasting products are often better quality products that require fewer repairs and create less waste than disposables. They may cost more at first, but they save money in the long run.
- Invest in cloth napkins for everyday use and use reusable wiping cloths and towels rather than paper towels for home cleaning projects.
- Avoid buying disposable dishes. For picnics and parties, invest in reusable, *durable* plastic plates and cups that can be washed and used again.
- Buy refillables and reusables. Instead of using disposable razors, lighters, pens, and cameras, invest in a good razor with replaceable blades, a refillable lighter, pens with refills and a camera that lets you change the film.
- Use cloth rather than disposable diapers. Even if you can't wash diapers at home, diaper services are generally less expensive than buying disposable diapers.
- Buy rechargeable batteries.

Maintain and Repair

Maintain and repair items such as tools, appliances, shoes, and clothing to ensure long productive life. If you are unsure how to do your own repairs, repair manuals are available in bookstores and libraries, or repair services can be found in the Yellow Pages.

Borrow or Rent

Borrow or rent items you use infrequently, such as audiovisual equipment, tools, appliances, and baby or office furniture.

Donate What You No Longer Need

Pass along clothes, books, appliances, furniture and other items to friends, neighbors, libraries, schools, nursing homes, or other charities.

Backyard Composting

Approximately 20% of Maine's municipal waste is composed of organic kitchen and yard waste!

Compost your kitchen scraps, grass clippings, leaves, weeds, and woody wastes to grow healthier plants. Backyard composting turns organic waste into a valuable soil amendment. Prefabricated compost bins are available in most home & garden, department, and hardware stores or you can build your own.

Reuse Materials to Make the Things You Need

- Remove nails and other hardware from used lumber. It can then be made into birdhouses, mailboxes or other small carpentry projects, or it can be used as firewood if it is unpainted and not pressure-treated.
- Use broken concrete and brick to make retaining walls, walkways and patios, or use for fill.

Junk Mail

To remove your name from junk mail advertising lists, send a letter to: Mail Preference Service, Direct Marketing Association, PO Box 9008, Farmingdale, NY 11735-9008. To eliminate junk mail permanently, tell the service that your name may not be sold or given to any advertiser. There is no charge for this service.

For more information, please contact:

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